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SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: MONUC, FARDC ADVANCE ON MILITIAS

REF: KINSHASA 631

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) According to internal reports from MONUC's Eastern Division military headquarters, MONUC forces conducted joint operations with the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) April 21-23 to seize several towns in Ituri District from militia control. The recent operations were meant to prepare the ground in advance of Ituri Explorer, which will aim to eliminate militia forces based in the southern part of Ituri (reftel).

¶2. (C) On April 21, two companies of MONUC peacekeepers (one Pakistani, one South African) staged a joint operation to clear the village of Khajana of militia elements. After heavy mortar fire on selected militia positions, MONUC and FARDC troops cordoned off Khajana. Three FARDC companies were subsequently dispatched to patrol Khajana and the vicinity. One FARDC soldier was killed in the fighting, while the bodies of four militia members were recovered. MONUC forces captured weapons and ammunition left by the militias, including 3 AK-47s, a dozen rocket-propelled grenades, and 75 mortar shells. FARDC and MONUC forces report Khajana has been under their control since April 21, although there have been reports of some militia movement in the Geti area, just south of Khajana.

¶3. (C) Also on April 21, two companies each of Nepalese peacekeepers and FARDC troops launched a cordon-and-search operation named Operation Ituri Element-1 of the Bale area (approximately 50 miles northwest of Bunia). FARDC forces encountered militias in the Lovo and Brumo areas, but the militias fled before the FARDC troops could engage them further. On April 22-23, the joint forces continued cordon-and-search operations in the villages of Mola and Aruda. MONUC reports that no militia were sighted during these patrols.

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